CHAPTER 5

'I Remember Their Labels Round Their Necks' Britain and the Kindertransport

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There is a public perception that there is something quintessentially British about the story of the Kindertransport. This view has been reinforced by politicians, artists and writers: when the writer Michael Bond was interviewed in 2014 on the occasion of the release of the first cinema film based on his Paddington children's book series he said that 'Refugees are the saddest sight'[1] and it was stated in a number of newspaper articles that Bond was 'inspired by memories of Jewish children arriving at Reading station just before the outbreak of the Second World War',[2] clearly referring to the Kindertransport. The Paddington books and films show an ultimately positive picture of British society's attitude to refugees and migrants. Although initially met with suspicion, the loveable bear Paddington—originally from darkest Peru—overcomes these obstacles and integrates perfectly into British society living with the nice middle-class Brown family.

[1]Michael Bond quoted in Julia Llewellyn Smith, 'Michael Bond: "I Was Worried That I'd Let Paddington Down…"', *The Telegraph*, 23 November 2014; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/11247595/Michael-Bond-I-was-worried-that-Id-let-Paddington-down….html (accessed 5 December 2017).

[2]Julia Llewellyn Smith, 'Michael Bond: "I Was Worried That I'd Let Paddington Down…"', *The Telegraph*, 23 November 2014; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/11247595/Michael-Bond-I-was-worried-that-Id-let-Paddington-down….html (accessed 5 December 2017).

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As this example illustrates, the Kindertransport is generally seen as a positive chapter in British history. Since summer 2015, when refugees fleeing the war in Syria came to the attention of the British media and thus the wider British public, the Kindertransport has often been invoked as a shining example of Britain's past humanitarian attitude towards refugees in the context of the present governments reluctance to admit refugees to Britain.[3]

The involvement of a British politician, Lord Alf Dubs, a Labour peer sitting in the House of Lords, in trying to persuade the British government to accept more refugees fleeing the Syrian war, is another reason for this comparison between the two groups of refugees, despite the fact that nearly 80 years have elapsed since the arrival of the first Kindertransportees in Britain. Alf Dubs tabled an amendment to the 2016 UK Immigration Bill asking for the government to admit more unaccompanied child refugees.[4] Dubs fled to the UK aged six on a Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia, a biographical fact that he mentioned in his speech in the House of Lords on 21 March 2016:

> My Lords, ever since I tabled this amendment, I have been surprised at the level of interest, and above all support, from the wider public over the need to do something for unaccompanied child refugees in Europe. I declare an interest at the outset, as I arrived in this country in the summer of 1939 as an unaccompanied child refugee. This country at the time offered safety to some 10,000 children.[5]

Consequently, Dubs' identity as a former child refugee was mentioned in many media reports on the subject of the Bill and the Amendment. On 26 April 2016, *The Guardian* published an article entitled 'Fresh proposal to help child refugees stranded in Europe tabled' which refers to the Kindertransport as a government-backed scheme:

> A new proposal to help child refugees stranded in Europe has been tabled and is expected to pass in the House of Lords on Tuesday evening, following the government's vote against accepting 3,000 children into the UK. […] But, Lord

[3]See also Jessica Reinisch, 'History Matters… But Which One? Every Refugee Crisis Has a Context', 29 September 2015; http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/history-matters-but-which-one-every-refugee-crisis-has-a-context (accessed 1 December 2017) and Jennifer Craig-Norton, 'Contesting the Kindertransport as a 'Model' Refugee Response' in *European Judaism*, Vol. 50, Issue 2, September 2017, pp. 24–33.

[4]The text of Amendment 116 A read 'The Secretary of State must, as soon as possible after the passing of this Act, make arrangements to relocate to the United Kingdom and support a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from other countries in Europe.' https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-03-21/debates/AAE552DF-70A7-4220-8B67-D59EAA007FF4/ImmigrationBill (accessed 14 December 2017).

[5]See Hansard Online, https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2016-03-21/debates/AAE552DF-70A7-4220-8B67-D59EAA007FF4/ImmigrationBill (accessed 14 December 2017).

> Alf Dubs, the Labour peer who came to Britain as part of the government-backed Kindertransport scheme before the war, vowed to continue the fight and has tabled a proposal.[6]

Calling the Kindertransport 1938/39 government-backed is only partially true: the British government sought to avoid providing financial and organisational resources for the Kindertransport—at least initially. The Kindertransport was a visa-waiver scheme based on a change in policy in 1938. The objective of this chapter is to outline the situation of the Kindertransportees and their families as well as British immigration policy while discussing the developments in Kindertransport research and its position within Holocaust Studies and Holocaust education and in relation to today's attitudes towards refugees.

From 1933 the National Socialist German government pursued a policy of exclusion for Jewish Germans from public and economic life, which increased in intensity over the years. Many Jewish families started to consider emigration in the first half of the 1930s and searched for countries that would give them refuge while others were still hoping for a change of government in Germany. Most families wanted to emigrate together.[7] However, after the November pogrom in 1938, it became clear to the majority of Jews in Germany and in the by then annexed Austria that they had to accept any means of escape from the violence and persecution of the National Socialist government. Jewish men who had been arrested during the November pogrom often only managed to be released if they could provide evidence that they would have the possibility to leave German and Austria immediately. Thus, it had become clear to Jewish families that they had no choice but to flee the country individually rather than as a family unit.

The British government's immigration policy underwent dramatic changes during the first 40 years of the twentieth century: the Aliens Act of 1905 is considered by some the first law on the path to a modern immigration control system and to have been designed 'to stem the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe'.[8] Just before and just after the First World War the Aliens Restriction Acts 1914 and 1919 were passed, further limiting the rights of immigrants to enter the UK and it is argued that 'no trace of legal protection for refugees remained on the statute book'.[9] Immigrants were admitted on a case by case basis, the main consideration being whether the person seeking admittance was considered to be of benefit to the British state. There seems to have been some

[6]Karen McVeigh, Heather Stewart, and Rowena Mason, 'Fresh Proposal to Help Child Refugees Stranded in Europe Tabled', *The Guardian*, 26 April 2016; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/26/fresh-proposal-to-help-child-refugees-stranded-in-europe-tabled (accessed 1 December 2017).

[7]Claudia Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung. Die Kindertransporte 1938/39 nach Großbritannien* (Berlin: Metropol, 2006), pp. 39–42.

[8]Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948. British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), p. 16.

[9]London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948*, p. 17.

possibility of leniency and individual officials made decision on humanitarian grounds after 1919 and even after 1933, After 1933 Jewish organisations of Britain financially underwrote the admittance of Jewish refugees from the German Reich and administered the care and support for such Jewish refugees. Between 1933 and March 1938 the numbers of those seeking refuge were not as large as later, which made this arrangement feasible. This changed after the annexation of Austria in March 1938, when thousands of Austrian Jews sought to escape in a short space of time. Consequently, and with the tacit consent of the Anglo-Jewish community, Britain introduced a visa requirement making seeking refuge in Britain much harder. Fears regarding the state of the labour market and rising antisemitism played a part in this change towards further restrictions and these were fuelled by some xenophobic newspapers, certain sections of the government and far right groups. Others, however, continued to campaign for the rescue of more Jewish refugees. The details and consequences of the November Pogrom of 1938 were widely reported in British newspapers and raised awareness and sympathy with the British public.

It was this public pressure in response to the November Pogrom that pushed the British authorities into action. At a Cabinet Committee Meeting discussion on Foreign Policy on 14 November 1938 various possible reactions to the events were discussed, and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain stated that 'something effective should be done to alleviate the terrible fate of the Jews in Germany'.[10] He alluded to the public mood, and that there was a certain pressure on the government to be seen to be doing something. However, although various suggestions for helping the German Jews leave Germany were discussed, none was decided on during this particular meeting. The next day a group of Anglo-Jewish leaders met with Prime Minister Chamberlain, and at this meeting the idea of temporarily admitting a number of unaccompanied children for the purpose of training and education was discussed. Just a week later, the Home Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare announced the government's new refugee policy, which included the directive that all children whose maintenance could be guaranteed by private individuals or charitable organisations were allowed to be admitted to Britain without going through the arduous process of applying for a visa. This was the official go-ahead for the Kindertransport.[11] It is clear that public pressure and support was instrumental in pushing a formerly reluctant government to make this decision. It is also clear that the British government was only willing to support a policy change if it did not have to commit financial resources, thus only partially backing the scheme. The decision to admit children without their families was a momentous one, and this has been extensively discussed among

[10]Quoted in London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948*, p. 99.

[11]For aspects on the organisation history of the Kindertransport see Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung*; see also Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus. A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); see also Judith Tydor Baum el Schwartz, *Never Look Back. The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938–1945* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2012).

scholars. Early publications in English such as, for example, Barry Turner's … *And the Policeman smiled*[12] had presented a very positive narrative of the Kindertransport experience and thus of the decision to only admit unaccompanied child refugees. Turner was able to use the archives of the World Jewish Relief Fund which contain many case files of Kindertransportees. These files have since been closed to researchers and are only accessible to former Kindertransportees and their descendants. As Turner's work is not a conventional academic monograph containing no references it is almost impossible to check his sources. After this and other earlier largely celebratory accounts, the historians Tony Kushner and Louise London were at the forefront of the critical turn in research based on a thorough investigation of extensive archival sources. This led to a very critical stance towards the British government at the time, especially by London. In her book *Whitehall and the Jews*, London writes:

> Admission saved the children's lives. Exclusion sealed the fate of many of their parents. Three-quarters of the unaccompanied children in England by July 1939 had parents left behind in Greater Germany, in most cases with no means of support.[13]

This statement reflects the harsh reality of the situation while also being somewhat teleological. Nobody knew with any certainty in 1938/39 how the situation in Central Europe would develop. What was clear by that year was that children and adults who were defined as Jews by the National Socialist Race Laws had suffered extensive discrimination and violent persecution in Germany from 1933 onwards and in Austria after 1938. Until most recently in the field of Holocaust-related research, children suffering persecution were subsumed in the entirety of the Jewry suffering persecution, but it has been shown to be worthwhile to discuss the specific situation of children. Although it is difficult to analyse conclusively what effect the National Socialist antisemitic policies had on children as compared to adults, Marion Kaplan outlines the growing exclusion of Jewish children from mainstream schools in Germany following the implementation of the law euphemistically called *Gesetz gegen die Überfüllung der deutschen Schulen und Hochschulen*, a law overtly against the overcrowding of schools and high schools but in reality aimed at excluding Jews, and passed in April 1933.[14] A quota for the admission of Jewish children to German schools was set, many Jewish children were explicitly asked to leave their schools, others left after becoming more and more ostracised. Even for those who were still enrolled in mainstream German schools, everyday life

[12] Barry Turner, … *And the Policeman Smiled. 10 000 Children Escape from Nazi Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990).

[13] London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948*, p. 118.

[14] Marion Kaplan, *Der Mut zum Überleben. Jüdische Frauen und Familien in Nazideutschland* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2001), pp. 140–156.

was affected by exclusion from school trips and other extra-curricular activities. These changes must have been difficult to understand, especially for younger children, and even more so for those who had not been aware of their Jewish background before the National Socialist rise to power. Consequently, more and more children were sent to Jewish schools.

This trend only partially cushioned the children from discrimination and persecution, as public life in general, and the public sphere of children in particular—for example on their journeys to and from school—was littered with discriminatory incidents or even violent situations perpetrated by non-Jewish adults and children. Many former Kindertransportees have spoken about these or illustrated them in their memoirs. The former Kindertransportee Edith Milton writes about her experience as a Jewish child in public in Germany in her memoir: 'I shrink against the privet hedge, trying to be invisible, and am preparing myself to run away'.[15] Former Kindertransportee Ruth David states that 'she no longer wanted to be out of doors, life seemed too unsafe'.[16] Thus, it could be argued that children were even more prone to experience everyday violence because of their Jewish background than many adults.

Because of the threats experienced, most children understood their parents' efforts to find a way for them to emigrate, even if they were scared to leave their families. Martha Blend, born in 1930 and only nine years old when she came to Britain, remembers both her anxiety and the reasons for leaving her family:

> When my parents broke this news to me, I was devastated and burst into hysterical sobs at the mere thought. […] I felt as though some force stronger than myself was dragging me into an abyss and I had no power to prevent it. Although I was still very young, I had seen and understood the build-up of terror in the last two years, so I knew very well that my parents were doing this out of sheer necessity.[17]

Although many Jews in Germany had hesitated initially to prepare for emigration, Jewish organisations had discussed this option soon after the National Socialist rise to power. For example, relatively soon after 1933, the *Reich's Deputation of the German Jews* (*Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden*) decided that leaving Germany was the only way to save the lives and livelihoods of many German Jews, and thus decided to facilitate emigration which became one of the main tasks of the organisation.[18] As discussed above, most families tried to stay together when attempting to emigrate, but often this was not

[15] Edith Milton, *The Tiger in the Attic. Memories of the Kindertransport and Growing Up English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 3.

[16] Ruth David, *Child of Our Time. A Young Girl's Flight from the Holocaust* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003), p. 16.

[17] Martha Blend, *A Child Alone* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), p. 32.

[18] Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung*, p. 31.

possible. Sending children abroad unaccompanied, however, was not a popular option until the November Pogroms in 1938.

Discussing the emotions that the parents of the Kindertransportees must have felt when parting from their children is a relatively new topic in Kindertransport research. Although the courage of the parents, who sent their children abroad to save them, is generally acknowledged, post-war researchers have sometimes argued that not enough was known about the effects of parent–child separation,[19] which might have made such a course of action easier to follow for the parents at the time. However, publications such as the newsletter of the *League of Jewish Women* (*Jüdischer Frauenbund*) make it clear that as a matter of fact there was a discussion in the public domain about the negative effects of children emigrating on their own in the early 1930s.[20]

Researching life stories of former Kindertransportees in interview and memoir form show that many were told by their parents that the parents would follow them to Britain or emigrate themselves and send for the children after a period of a few months' separation. Although it is possible that in some cases this was simply a story told to the children to alleviate their anxiety, letters from the parents show that in many cases they did, in fact, try to organise onward migration to a third country where the whole family would then be reunited. In her memoir *Lifesaving Letters* Milena Roth includes a letter that her mother had written to her foster carer in English dated 3 June 1939:

> I feel awfully grateful and excited. […] And please tell your husband, that both my husband and I, thank you for your great kindness. I feel perfectly sure Milena will be safe in your hands and it is really for the moment the best for her. Let us hope that it will not take a too long time and that we all three, Milena, my husband and I can soon live together.[21]

In other cases, the families tried to put their children on a Kindertransport to keep the family together. One way of gaining a visa and work permit to the UK was to find employment as a domestic servant. The Jewish community in Vienna had pre-printed application forms on which parents could state that they had obtained a domestic permit to enter the UK and thus wished their child to be considered for a Kindertransport.[22] Clearly parents wanted

[19] See Ute Benz, 'Traumatisierung durch Trennung. Familien-und Heimatverlust als kindliche Katastrophen' in Wolfgang Benz, Claudia Curio, and Andrea Hammel (eds.), *Die Kindertransporte 1938/39. Rettung und Integration*, (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschebuch Verlag, 2003), pp. 136–155.

[20] D. Edinger, 'Ver Sacrum? Fragen einer Mutter', in *Blätter des jüdischen Frauenbundes* (November 1933), pp. 1–2.

[21] Milena Roth, *Lifesaving Letters. A Child's Flight from the Holocaust* (London: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 65.

[22] Completed form 'O', dated 14 June 1939, Collection Israelitische Kutlusgemeinde Wien, XXII. Fuersorge-und Wohlfahrtswesen, F. Jugendfuersorge, 7. Kinderauswanderung, Korrespondenzen ueber bereits abgereiste Kinder, 1938–1939, A/W 1962, Box 560, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

their children to be in the same country as them, possibly hoping for a speedy reunion. This worked out for some families but in the case of those who did work as domestic staff, their employers saw them as employees first and foremost and were not sensitive to their situation. Most were not allowed to have their children live with them. In other cases, the economically difficult circumstances and limited accommodation dictated that child refugees could not live with their parents, even if they had all resettled in Britain.[23]

As discussed, the eruption of violence towards the Jewish population in Germany during the November Pogroms of 1938 was not only a turning point for German Jewish organisations and individuals. It also showed the international community that the German Jews were in an absolutely desperate situation. The speed of organisation and the magnitude of this immigration movement are two of the reasons why the Kindertransport is often mentioned with admiration. But this admiration needs qualification. Neither swiftly organised emigration of large numbers of people nor child immigration to Britain were without precedent: during the Spanish Civil War, about 4000 unaccompanied Basque children found refuge in the UK and during the First World War a large number of Belgian child refugees were admitted to the UK. It also meant that no vetting or preparation of the children's placements was possible, which had dire consequences for some Kindertransportees who either had to change placements often, or lived in damaging placements. Nevertheless, the extremely short period of time of two weeks between the decision to admit unaccompanied child refugees in late November 1938 and the arrival of the first ferry on 2 December 1938 at Harwich with around 200 child refugees on board shows the determination and excellent organisational skills of all involved.

During the ten months between December 1938 and September 1939 transports arrived from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. On the German side, a Department for Child Emigration (*Abteilung Kinderauswanderung der Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden*) had already been established by the *Reich's Deputation of the German Jews* in 1933. This meant that there were people with experience available, who could deal with the formalities and organisation of a large group of Jewish children to be sent to the UK. In Austria, the situation was different, as there had been no communal initiative to send unaccompanied children abroad before the annexation of Austria in March 1938, which made the helpers less experienced. The fact that the Jewish population in Austria was concentrated mainly in Vienna, made their challenge a little easier. In Germany the Department for Child Emigration which had its offices in Berlin collected all the applications from Berlin itself and from provincial Jewish organisations and community offices located all over Germany. The Department pre-selected the applications and sent them

[23]William Dieneman, 'From Berlin to Aberystwyth: The Life History of a Former Kindertransportee', 20 March 2012; https://pure.aber.ac.uk/portal/en/activities/from-berlin-to-aberystwyth-the-life-history-of-a-former-kindertransportee(4748c198-6360-4eb8-9b4d-f2888f1d1812).html (accessed 14 February 2019).

on to London, where they were received by the *Movement for the Care of Children from Germany* which was later renamed *Refugee Children's Movement* (RCM) in 1939. Its headquarters were located in Bloomsbury House in London. Here the children who were deemed to be suitable for emigration were chosen and this was then communicated back to the Department for Child Emigration. The children and their parents were subsequently informed of the decision and were notified of their likely departure date. They were allowed to take two small pieces of luggage, which had to be labelled and had to be light enough to be able to be carried by the children themselves. No valuables and only a small amount of money was allowed to be taken out of Germany. The age of the children ranged from two to seventeen, though there were some reports of even younger children.

Trains left from Berlin or Frankfurt on the Main and the children were either asked to board the trains there or picked up at stations *en route*. A small number of adults were given the jobs by the Department to accompany the children on the train and supervise them. These adults were required to return to Germany after completing their task and there are no reports that any individual did not do so. The most likely route from Germany to the UK was via Bentheim and the Dutch Hoek of Holland, where the parties boarded the ferry to Harwich. There were also transports that took the train route to Hamburg or Bremen and from there a boat to Southampton. Upon arrival in the UK the children were either put in holding camps—a number of empty holiday camps in East Anglia had been put at the RCM's disposal, the largest being Dovercourt—or transferred straight onto trains to London, either arriving at London Liverpool Street Station or Victoria Station. Eventually children were either accommodated in hostels or with foster families. The first call for foster parents put out by public appeal in Britain elicited 500 immediate responses from those willing to accommodate children. There is little evidence that the number of Kindertransportees was ever limited during the ten month duration of the scheme by a lack of foster parents which is astonishing. However, as discussed before there was no or little vetting of the placements offered.

The decision by the British government to only admit unaccompanied child refugees on the Kindertransport has been scrutinised by many. There was clearly pressure from the public and the media to select refugees that would not immediately seek employment and thus potentially disadvantage unemployed British citizens. This can also be seen as a reason behind the decision to only give work permits to those who were willing to work in jobs that were not attracting British applicants such as domestic work or nursing. Furthermore, it is clear that British society and British politics suffered from its fair share of antisemitism. In her conclusion to *Whitehall and the Jews*, London quotes politicians, officials and ordinary citizens with antisemitic opinions, stating 'moderate indulgence in social anti-Jewish prejudice were so widespread as

to be unremarkable.'[24] Adult refugees, especially adult males, were seen as threatening. Child refugees, however, did not have the same negative connotation and also could be imagined as readily assimilating. The pictures of child refugees that were published in newspapers of the time portray an image of the children as sweet and innocent: it can be argued that if child refugees are portrayed as innocent, this makes adult refugees somehow guilty and deserving persecution. Placing the child refugees with foster parents also had the advantage that they were dispersed around the country and not likely to be very visible in large numbers to those who were critical of Jewish refugees coming to the UK.

Many more families wished to put their children forward for a Kindertransport to the UK than were able to be put forward for the flight to Britain. Kindertransport researchers have tried to investigate the issue of bias towards certain groups such as middle-class children when it came to being selected for the chance to seek refuge in the UK. Claudio Curio carried out an extensive study of the organisational structure behind the Kindertransport on the continent and in the UK using both German-language and English-language sources. Curio came to the conclusion that there was no overt bias against certain groups of children.[25] In the beginning of the Kindertransport movement a sizeable number of children were selected according to the urgency of them having to leave Germany, i.e. boys between fifteen and seventeen years old were seen as particularly urgent cases as they were at danger of arrest. Also, children who were living in children's homes were perceived to be priority cases as they were easily identifiable by those wishing to carry out violent acts. Other urgent cases were those living without one or both of their parents and those in particularly straightened circumstances. The decision making process was made more difficult by the British foster parents preferring to offer girls between six and ten a home. Not finding evidence of overt bias does not mean that it was not more difficult for children from certain backgrounds to emigrate. Firstly, the parents had to have the initiative to seek a place on a Kindertransport. Secondly, as most British foster families were not Jewish, many of parents were asked to sign a permission form to allow their children to be placed in non-Jewish families. Children from families who were not willing to allow this and did not sign the form had clearly a diminished chance to find a placement. Furthermore, the RCM did try and select children who would make a good impression on their British hosts and would thus convince others in Britain to continue and enlarge the scheme. Thus children who had disabilities or displayed behavioural problems—even very minor ones such as bed-wetting—were far less likely to be picked for a transport to Britain.

As mentioned before the British government did not commit to spend public funds on the Kindertransport, on the contrary it pushed the financial burden on private individuals and charities by demanding that every child

[24] London, *Whitehall and the Jews 1933–1948*, p. 276.

[25] Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung*, pp. 58–63.

refugee to be admitted under this scheme was to be 'guaranteed', i.e. the sum of £50 was to be put up to indemnify the British government against any cost arising from admitting the child to the UK. Additionally, funds were needed for the actual journey and the upkeep of the children. Some of their German and Austrian birth parents were in a position to pay for the travel costs, many were not. Eleanor Rathbone, an Independent MP who championed the cause of refugees from the continent, argued in a pamphlet published in 1939, that private charitable appeals would not be sufficient to raise the necessary funds.[26] She argued several million pounds were required and should be provided by the government. The government of the time did not agree to this.

One major source of funds was the Jewish community's pre-existing Jewish Refugees Committee. During the 1930s the committee raised over £5 million. Another source of funding was the Lord Baldwin Fund for Refugees. Philip Voss, a Jewish barrister and Labour Party activist, was a prime mover in the foundation of this charity. He persuaded Lord Baldwin, the former British prime minister, to lend his name to the fund. Although previously a supporter of appeasement, Lord Baldwin had clearly changed his mind and in early December 1938 he gave a BBC radio appeal in aid of this new charity.[27] He argued that Jewish children and those of Jewish descent in the Germany and Austria faced an existential threat and proclaimed 'Shall they Live? Before it is too late get them out!' a headline that was also used for the newspaper advertising for the Baldwin Fund. Other prominent individuals such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Cosmo Lang, and the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop, Arthur Hinsley, gave their support to the charity. The Post Office Savings Bank issued special savings stamp books in support of the appeal. Many newspapers, even those like the Daily Mail that had a long history of hostility towards refugees, supported the Fund which raised over £500,000.[28]

Half of this money was used to finance the immigration of Jewish child refugees. Other guarantors were private individuals who were either identical with the child's prospective foster carers or people who just guaranteed the upkeep of the child refugee while they were placed elsewhere. Until about March 1939, an unspecified number of children who were sent to Britain did not have an individual guarantor, but were supported by a pool of guarantees to be distributed by the RCM as they saw fit. Due to financial constraints by spring 1939 this pool of guarantees from general funds was restricted

[26]See Susan Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010).

[27]For an excerpt of 'Lord Baldwin's Appeal for Refugees' BBC radio broadcast aired 8 December 1938, see https://vimeo.com/117834111 (accessed 14 February 2019).

[28]Richard Hawkins, 'The Lord Baldwin Fund for Refugees, 1938–39: A Case Study of Third Sector Marketing in Pre-World War II Britain', in Leighann C. Neilson (ed.), *Varieties, Alternatives, and Deviations in Marketing History: Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM)* (Copenhagen, Denmark: CHARM Association, 2013), pp. 82–105.

to 200 cases, which meant that only if one of the 200 individuals was no longer in need of a guarantee, could another child refugee come to Britain in his or her stead. From March 1939 onwards, in the majority of cases, only children who had an individual guarantor could enter Britain. This was a significant change in procedure and led to a complicated relationship between the German Department for Child Emigration and the RCM. Potential guarantors and foster parents in the UK were most keen to foster girls between six and ten, which was not the largest group of child refugees waiting to leave Germany. The RCM forcefully rejected the German and Austrian child refugee departments' attempts to ask for further children without individual guarantees to be allowed entry into the UK:

> The Movement for the Transport of Children [*sic*], again, cannot bring over more unguaranteed children, until those already here have been placed. I regret that it is no use to continue to ask for more help than we are giving, because it is not in our power to grant it.[29]

Not all children who came to Britain on a Kindertransport were Jewish. About 20% of the Kindertransport child refugees were defined as Jewish by the National Socialist regime. According to the National Socialist Race Laws a person was considered Jewish if they had one Jewish grandparent. This did not correspond to the Jewish community's definition, of course, nor to many individuals' self-definition. At the time these people were referred to as so-called 'non-Aryan Christians' by both British and German organisations, and included children with a combination of Christian and Jewish parents or grandparents who either had no religious affiliation or were in fact Christians. The Quakers, also known as the *Society of Friends*, with offices in Berlin and Vienna and other specific organisations connected to the Protestant and Catholic Church assisted this group of children on the continent.[30] The RCM in Britain was an interdenominational organisation and took care of all the different groups of children. Not unsurprisingly, a certain amount of wrangling is reported between the representatives of the different groups about the numbers of places allocated to each group.

As mentioned above, the situation in Austria was less organised, but the Department of Child Emigration of the Jewish community in Vienna nevertheless managed to put together their first transport to the UK in December 1938, which included 500 child refugees and remained the largest single transport. Research shows that there were constant debates between the parents of potential child refugees and the RCM in the UK, with the Department for Child Emigration of the Viennese Jewish community positioned in the

[29] Quoted in Rebekka Göpfert, *Der jüdische Kindertransport von Deutschland nach England 1938/39* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1999), p. 92.

[30] See Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung* and Jana Leichsenring, *Die Katholische Kirche und 'ihre' Juden* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003).

middle.[31] Parents were clearly eager to place their children on a transport and stressed their individual plight. The RCM was eager that only those children who had no special needs and were well-behaved should come to the UK, thus making their placement easier and creating a positive precedent which might encourage more people to come forward in aid of future child refugees. The Viennese department was dependent on the good will of the RCM, but also most immediately aware of the needs of the Austrian children. It seems that in the beginning the social workers in the department gave an honest account of a child's needs to aid the preparation of a foster placement in the manner of modern social work professionalism. When it became known to the RCM that a child had special needs, it often meant that they excluded the child from the transports. Sometimes even those who had an individual guarantor were excluded. The consequence of this was 'less thorough' medical examinations, which in turn made the RCM suspicious and lead to accusations that the Viennese department was not working as well as required.

To conclude, one can only emphasise the difficult circumstances all agencies were working under and that tensions were structural rather than based on failures on one side or the other. Behavioural problems were clearly an understandable reaction from the children placed under stress, but they were seen as a problem that might jeopardise the whole operation. For the British public, the media and the government, refugee children had to be portrayed as helpless victims, perfectly placed for integration and grateful to Britain for their rescue.

Because of time pressure, very little effort was made to match up the potential foster families with the children. This led to many unsuitable situations which ranged from a mismatch in cultural and religious backgrounds between foster families and children to situations in which the children suffered physical and sexual abuse.[32] Also, as nobody could have predicted the events of the Second World War, many foster parents had not realised the length of time they would be required to look after their charges. As the children got older and entered adolescence, their relationship with their foster parents became often more difficult. In many cases, those who arrived as adolescents were accommodated in hostels with other young refugees. Overall, this seems to have been a preferable option for older Kindertransportees as they felt more comfortable in the company of other young people with a similar background. Some of the older Kindertransportees were very disappointed when they were not allowed to follow the educational path they had originally anticipated. They encountered prejudices that a basic education should be 'good enough' for a refugee and that they should earn their own money as soon as possible. After the outbreak of war, many older Kindertransportees played their part in the British war effort, either joining the army or working in a variety of jobs that were considered useful. There are as many Kindertransport stories

[31] Curio, *Verfolgung, Flucht, Rettung*, pp. 83–92.

[32] See Fast, *Children's Exodus*, pp. 41–59.

as there are Kindertransportees and it seems that it depends on a wide variety of factors how individual Kindertransportees remember the war years and use this narrative to construct their identity.

Although the British government can only be described as a rather reluctant partner in the Kindertransport rescue effort, after 1945 it decided to offer naturalisation to almost all refugees that had spent the war in the UK and many former Kindertransportees who had reached the age of maturity by then, became naturalised.

There has been some debate on how many of the Kindertransportees who came to the UK were reunited with their parents after 1945. As no reliable statistics are available for many years it had been assumed that 90% of children lost both their parents. However, in 2008 the *Association of Jewish Refugees* in the UK (AJR) sent out questionnaires to over 1500 surviving former Kindertransportees and over 1000 were returned. Although the survey cannot claim to be reliably representative, there are a number of striking overlaps between statistical data known from contemporary sources of the 1930s and 1940s and statistical data of the *AJR Kindersurvey*. The survey concludes that about 60% of the former Kindertransportees never saw their parents again.[33] However, as Jennifer Craig-Morton has pointed out those filling out the questionnaire were those willing to engage with their past as a Kindertransportee. Those with a more traumatic story, i.e. those whose parents were murdered, might be less likely to do so. In sum, we have to admit that we just do not know and that we are unlikely to ever know.

This trauma of separation and loss affected the former Kindertransportees for the rest of their lives. But even those who were reunited with one or even both parents had a very difficult time. Ruth Barnett, born January 1935 describes the adjustment difficulties of both herself and her mother who had last seen her as a four-year old and met her again as a teenager after the war.[34] By that time and after a number of problematic placements, Barnett had found a foster family that offered her stability and even considered an application to adopt her. Barnett unsuccessfully returned to Germany but did not manage to settle into life with her birth parents, who eventually reluctantly agreed to let her go to university in Britain.

The Kindertransport clearly was only made possible due to the will and action of many helpers in the UK and on the continent. Many of the latter perished in the Holocaust. As we have outlined, it is only partially correct to say that the Kindertransport was backed by the British government. It was, however, backed by thousands of British people who worked in local committees, raised funds and offered foster homes. The national Refugee Children's Movement acknowledged this effort by the British public in its third

[33] http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey (accessed 18 february 2017).

[34] See Ruth Barnett, *Person of No Nationality: A Story of Childhood Separation, Loss and Recovery* (London: David Paul Books, 2011).

report in 1941: 'The Movement desires to place on record its deep indebtedness to the work of regional and local Guardian Committees and of many other voluntary helpers. Much personal sacrifice of time and energy has been willingly borne'.[35] There were twelve regional committees and some of the local committees such as the Cambridge Refugee Committee (CRC) and the Cambridge Refugee Children's Committee (CRCC), initially a subcommittee of the former, later with independent offices, and the Manchester Refugee Committee have been researched in more detail than other committees.[36] What becomes clear from the committee papers surviving in archives is that it was a huge effort by largely private citizens that made the Kindertransport possible. Nicholas Winton is almost the only one of those involved in the rescue operation whose name is still known to the British public today. However, there very many others and especially a large number of women who did the majority of work on the ground as Sybil Oldfield pointed out in her article '"It is usually She": The Role of British Women in the Rescue and Care of the Kindertransport Kinder'.[37] The fact that Nicholas Winton was relatively young in 1939 and still alive in the twenty-first century—he died in 2015 aged 106—made him into a figure head for those who organised and aided the Kindertransport in the UK. It is clear, though, that he was one of many dedicated people.

Very little records or testimonies from the foster parents survive. There are letters between foster parents and birth parents but these often follow the polite conventions expected of such exchanges, the birth parents expressing gratitude and the foster parents expressing sympathy. It is difficult to discern a comprehensive picture of everyday life in a family where a Kindertransportee found a foster placement. A very small number of memoirs, including those of former foster siblings, outline the challenges of living with a newly arrived child refugee. Ann herself was of the same age at the time. Chadwick draws on some essays her mother wrote for a course training to work with children with behavioural needs. In these texts, Chadwick's mother points out that it was the birth daughter Ann who started to display challenging behaviour after the arrival of the Kindertransportee Suzie:

> She highlights it was me rather than Suzie who was traumatized by our coming together and that once I recommenced bed-wetting and exhibited jealous

[35] Refugee Children's Movement, Third Annual Report, 1941, Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief, National Archives London, ACC/2793.

[36] See Mike Levy, 'We Must Save the Children', exhibition and talk, January 2017, Newnham College Cambridge; Gertrude Dubrovsky, *Six from Leipzig* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), especially chapters 2, 3 and 4.

[37] Sybil Oldfield, '"It is usually She": The Role of British Women in the Rescue and Care of the Kindertransport Kinder', in Wolfgang Benz, Claudia Curio, and Andrea Hammel (eds.), *Shofar. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, No. 1, Fall 2004, pp. 57–70.

> tantrums and withdrawal symptoms, she had to resort to help from the Child Guidance Clinic to help me readjust.
>
> It is not surprising. Both of us had been only children, adored and spoilt by our respective parents […]. We did fight too.[38]

Clearly this particular foster family had the insight and resources to help both children adjust to their new situation. Not all foster parents were able to do this and thus many Kindertransportees had to change placements frequently.

Much of what we know today about the Kindertransport has been mediated through memorial efforts by the former Kindertransportees themselves and others who are committed to Holocaust commemoration. The relative obscurity of the Kindertransport as a refugee movement and of the fate of individual Kindertransportees changed dramatically in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This was instigated by the former child refugees themselves who from 1989 onwards organised a number of reunion meetings for smaller and larger groups. They were also extremely active in writing memoirs and volunteering to give testimony in different ways. Tony Kushner argues that

> of all refugee movements in twentieth century Britain […] it is the arrival of what turned out to be close to ten thousand children in the last ten months of peace that has produced the largest number of histories, memoirs, exhibitions, plays, documentaries, films […], and memorials.'[39]

In Britain today, the former Kindertransportees are a high-profile group who are celebrated and accepted by the British establishment. This manifested itself in a knighthood for the Chair of the *Association of Jewish Refugees' Kindertransport* group, now Sir Erich Reich, and a number of receptions for former Kindertransportees hosted by members of the Royal family. Prominent former Kindertransportees include the politician Lord Alf Dubs, the artist Frank Auerbach and the Nobel laureate Walter Kohn.

It is clear that the Kindertransport does play a special role when considering the Holocaust in Britain today. In 2011 *The English German Girl*, a novel by the British author Jake Wallis Simons was published.[40] It focuses on the Kindertransportee Rosa who flees to Britain from Berlin aged 15. In correspondence the author, born into an Anglo-Jewish family in 1978 in the UK, reveals that he chose the Kindertransport as the subject for a novel because he felt that it was an accessible British topic:

> The Holocaust is a difficult and dangerous subject for a novelist […] Recently, I think, we have entered a phase in which fiction is necessary if the memory of

[38] Ann Chadwick, *Suzie. The Little Girl Who Changed Our Lives* (Cambridge: Keystage Arts and Heritage Company, 2012).

[39] Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 141.

[40] Jake Wallis Simons, *The English German Girl* (London: Polygon, 2011).

> the Holocaust is to be kept alive for future generations. However, as someone who did not live through the period, the risk of being transgressive with other people's memories, or of trivialising the extent of the horror, was great. Therefore, I chose the Kindertransport, as it seemed more accessible than the 'core' of the mass slaughter. It contained both despair and hope; it had a profound link to the UK; and it gestured towards this 'core' without articulating it explicitly.[41]

For Britain the Kindertransport is an area that gives a unique angle into the subject of the Holocaust. The twenty-first century throws up a number of questions: clearly, we are at a time that Holocaust and Kindertransport memory can rarely be passed on first hand from eye witnesses any more. Therefore, we will need to rely more on memorialisation attempts through various forms of literature and art. While the feeling of immediacy might be lost in this process, it opens up space for reflecting creatively on the subject of the Kindertransport and thus opening up the complexity of the subject. Eyewitnesses allow themselves to be more critical of the events of their past. The 80th commemoration of the Kindertransport has further increased public interest and has also brought a much more nuanced picture of the Kindertransport to the attention of the British public.[42] In 2018/19 the only eyewitnesses likely to be able to bear witness in person are child survivors and child refugees. This takes the former Kindertransportees more into the centre of Holocaust commemoration and education than ever before. As a consequence former Kindertransportees do not focus only on the rescue aspect of their experience but also on the trauma of their separation and the trauma of the Holocaust in general.

Like many subjects, Kindertransport research has developed in a specific historical context moving from testimonies and collections of autobiographical writing to critical studies involving extensive archival research in the UK and abroad. There is clearly no unified narrative to this research, nor is there such a narrative to the Kindertransport experience itself, however, some of the more naively celebratory narratives have given way to more complex and comprehensive analyses. The Kindertransport 1938/39 was enabled by a policy change introduced by the British government of 1938 and the operation of the process was aided by a large number of British citizens. Most former Kindertransportees would argue that the outcome would have been more positive if they had been able to seek refuge in the UK together with their families. The scheme was underfunded and had many flaws such as a lack of suitable placements for the children and lack of training and supervision of those involved. These needs to be recognised when celebrating the

[41] Jake Wallis Simons in an email to Andrea Hammel, 14 May 2011.

[42] For example, the Guardian newspaper ran a series of articles between 6 and 10 November 2018, covering many different aspects of individual Kindertransportees' stories, see for example https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/08/the-kindertransport-children-80-years-on-when-i-was-14-my-mother-appeared-out-of-nowhere (accessed 13 February 2019).

Kindertransport as a humanitarian success in Britain. Another area that has received far too little attention are those Kindertransportees that migrated to other countries after having initially arrived in Britain. We might yet have to revise our idea of the Kindertransport as mainly a British phenomenon.

Kindertransport research has shown that there are many variants in narrative and outcome: age, gender, religious traditions and individual personality shaped every single Kindertransport story. The fact that nearly 10,000 child refugees fled to the UK in such a short space of the time, the fact that a number of them rose to prominence in British public life and the fact that an active reunion movement facilitated the exploration of the common context, are all contributing factors to the endurance and resurgence of the Kindertransport history and memory.

Tony Kushner argued in 2006 that 'The *Kinder*, by the start of the twenty-first century, had become a safe story, put together neatly and with a redemptive ending'.[43] Recent scholarship has shown this to be false. To be meaningful at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century we have to make connections between Kindertransport research and education and other Holocaust research and education in the context of contemporary persecution, exclusions and refugee issues in Britain today. When it came to the attention of the British public that thousands of refugees were fleeing from the war in Syria and were trying to find refuge in Europe, the response of the British government was less generous than the governments of some other larger European countries such as Germany and Sweden. The British government is committed to admitting up to 20,000 refugees within 5 years. It is not surprising that the Kindertransport 1938/39 is sometimes hailed as a shining example in comparison with today. However, as this chapter has shown, no easy comparisons can be made. But there are some similarities regarding grass-roots support: in 2016 the British government launched the Community Sponsorship Scheme to aid refugees affected by the war in Syria.[44] Community groups made up of British residents can apply to the Home Office to sponsor a refugee family and facilitate the family finding refuge in their community. The Community group has to find accommodation for the family, prove to the Home Office that facilities such as educational opportunities and capacity in the health service is available in the area and they have to fundraise a guarantee of £4500 per adult to be sponsored. The difference between the Community Sponsorship Scheme and the Kindertransport is clear: in twenty-first-century refugee families are to be supported to come to Britain. However, the similarities are also striking: it suggests that once again there is a dichotomy between the public and the governmental response to a humanitarian crisis. It

[43] Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, p. 165.

[44] See https://www.gov.uk/government/news/community-sponsorship-scheme-launched-for-refugees-in-the-uk (accessed 12 December 2017) for details of the Community Sponsorship Scheme. The scheme was launched on 19 July 2016 by the Home Secretary Amber Rudd and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby.

has been suggested that in a climate of austerity in Britain and especially after the Brexit referendum in 2016, the British people do not wish to accommodate more refugees and migrants in their country similar to the British people in 1938/39 who were said to be weary of Jewish refugees. However, a sizable section of the British population was and is willing to go to great lengths to assist and resettle refugees. The British political establishment should not be able to celebrate the rescue of the Kindertransportees while refusing to assist present-day refugees.

PART III

War and Holocaust